

Peace Corps Veterans Hold Vigil for Kennedy

At the Capitol Rotunda, Volunteers Evoke the Legacy and the Loss

By Michael Kernan
Washington Post Staff Writer

"The party ended. All of us were in tears . . . I guess most Americans have no idea how loved President Kennedy was abroad."

Warren Kinsman, a Peace Corps volunteer in Turkey, 1962-'64, was speaking, his voice reverberating around the Capitol Rotunda. He was one of an unending procession of former volunteers, one of the voices in this 24-hour vigil called Journals of Peace.

It was the first time since John Kennedy was killed 25 years ago that the Rotunda had seen such a vigil.

Even the press, crowded around the impromptu podium set between the statues of Lincoln and Roger Williams, seemed subdued.

"Turks came up to me and started expressing their condolences," Kinsman said. "It was as if in their eyes I had lost a member of my family, yet it was even deeper than that. It was

Remembering the Man

Twenty-five years ago today, while riding in a motorcade in Dallas, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Since then, both the life and the death of Kennedy have been chronicled and debated. Like much of America on that day, Dallas still blames itself. Like much of Washington in the days afterward, Peace Corps veterans have gathered to memorialize him in the Capitol Rotunda.

Through books, movies and television, Kennedy's image has become an institution, a mark against which other presidents and candidates are measured, and a symbol of the dreams that turned to despair in the years after his death.

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as if they, too, had lost a family member."

One after another the people stepped up to speak for a few minutes, to read from their journals, to recite a poem.

It would go on through the night. Adryan Russ (Colombia, '65-'67) came from Santa Barbara to sing a song she had written, "We're Not That Different, You and Me."

"The day President Kennedy was

killed I was in the hospital in Addis Ababa," said Peggy Jo Drury (Ethiopia, '62-'64), who had suffered a broken back and pelvis in a highway accident.

"My students seemed to feel the same spiritual relationship to President Kennedy as I did. They came to my hospital room to sit silently, to hold a sort of vigil."

One student walked barefoot sev-
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BY GARY A. CAMERON—THE WASHINGTON POST

Part of the crowd of visitors at John F. Kennedy's gravesite in Arlington National Cemetery yesterday.

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en days to reach her hospital, she said, "because he wanted to tell me how sorry he was that President Kennedy, our great leader, had died."

Some alumni told of their achievements, but most talked about the people they had met, the friends they had made in strange lands.

Cecilia Grenier (Benin, '72-'74; Togo, '76-'78): "I see the faces of these friends whom I have grappled to my soul with grips of steel and offer them once again the bread of hospitality and the sign of peace."

Her voice thickened as she finished, and she turned quickly from the microphones.

Visitors trailed through the echoing marble chamber, gawking to see if the TV cameras and mikes were for some celebrity or other. But they were just regular citizens, not all young, a woman carrying a raincoat, a man in a tweed jacket with the elbows out.

Not many of the visitors stopped to listen.

"The power of John Kennedy's voice reached Africa and Africans in ways I still do not understand," said Roger Landrum (Nigeria, '61-'63).

"Nigerian villagers believed that he cared deeply about their personal welfare. Their expectations of us, like Kennedy's expectations, were so high that wherever we were assigned and whatever we were assigned to do, we stretched ourselves to a higher level of performance," he said.

The vigil is to end at noon today, just before the commemorative service at St. Matthew's Cathedral, where Sargent Shriver, the first Peace Corps director, and Loret Ruppe, the current director, are to appear, along with the Kennedy family.

Organized by the National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers—there are 130,000 of them—the vigil calls attention to the corps as perhaps the most visible and surely the best loved legacy of Kennedy. The journals kept by thousands of volunteers are part of the story.

"The day that Kennedy died, I was on an old wired-together battered blue bus that was lurching down the hillside toward El Centro from my *barriada*, Alto De Selva Alegre,"



Former Peace Corps volunteer Roger Landrum reads at yesterday's vigil.

KENNEDY MEMORIAL EVENTS

■ **Arlington National Cemetery**—At 8:15 a.m., there will be a memorial mass in the Amphitheater chapel for the White House staff, which will lay a wreath at the John F. Kennedy gravesite. At 10 a.m., a Special Forces memorial service at the Tomb of the Unknowns followed by an 11 a.m. wreath-laying at the gravesite. At 2 p.m., the Ancient Order of Hibernians will hold a service in the old amphitheater. All events are open to the public. Call 695-3250 for more information.

■ **St. Matthew's Cathedral**—A 1 p.m. commemorative service with the Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, president emeritus of Notre Dame, journalist Bill Moyers, former Peace Corps director Sargent Shriver and current director Loret Ruppe. A memorial concert at 8 p.m. with the Shenandoah Conservatory Choir, the George Mason Chorale and the Shenandoah Conservatory Symphony Orchestra performing "Requiem," by Faure and other works. 1725 Rhode Island Ave. NW. Free. 764-6200.

■ **"JFK 25 Years Later: A Thanksgiving Remembrance"**—A discussion marking the 25th anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination, focusing on the legacy of the values of his administration, with Colman McCarthy of The Washington Post, 7:30 p.m., Community Center, 4433 South Park Ave., Chevy Chase. Free. 656-2797.

wrote Patricia Behler (Peru, '62-'64). "When we got to the stop nearest the Peruvian North American Cultural Center, I saw a large black ribbon bow on the closed door . . . People on the street would stop me and give me the *abrazo*, or condolence for the death of a loved one."

They said the same things.

They remembered where they had been on that November day.

They talked of a death in the family.

They recited Kennedy's ringing call to "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do

for your country." They said Jack Kennedy had changed their lives.

Ron Ivy (Peru, '66-'68), a Colorado farm boy now in Washington, a high school junior when Kennedy was elected, a college sophomore when he was murdered:

"I had started to ask questions about what to do with my life. The way he spoke always moved me. I realized that I wanted to become a part of that special group that is going to do something good for the world."

He ended as many others did. "Thank you, JFK."